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Items of Interest:

Get your flu vaccine! The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends everyone to get an influenza (flu) vaccination for this 2007—2008 flu season. Though flu season begins in the fall, the peak of flu activity occurs during the month of January or even later in the winter. So there is still time to get your flu vaccination. Getting the vaccine is the single most important thing you can do to protect yourself and your loved ones against the flu. The flu vaccine is now available for health adults in the form of a nasal spray and is still available in its traditional form of the "flu shot". The flu vaccine is available throughout your local communities and at your local military medical treatment facilities. For more information, visit www.cdc.gov

Navy and Marine Corps Medical News

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Rear Admiral Vinci Takes Naval Medicine Support Command Helm

By Mass Communications Specialist
2nd Class Daniel Gay, Fleet Public Affairs Center, Det. Southeast

NAVY MEDICINE SUPPORT COMMAND (NMSC) JACKSONVILLE, Fla. – Command of Navy Medicine Support Command (NMSC) changed hands Nov. 16 when Rear Adm. Richard Vinci, Chief of the Dental Corps, relieved Rear Adm. Carol Turner during a Change of Command Ceremony held on board Naval Air Station (NAS) Jacksonville. Rear Adm. Thomas Cullison, Deputy Surgeon General of the Navy, was the guest speaker.

Rear Adm. Turner held command over NMSC since it was established in November 2005, making Rear Adm. Vinci only the second to take control of the NMSC mission.

"NMSC is relatively new to Navy Medicine," said Vinci. "We regional-

ized our hospitals and now have regionalized the support functions," he said. "And I'm just as proud as can be to be the second commander of this unit."

The first change of command for NMSC also marked the first time since the 1980's that two active-duty admirals have been based and resided at NAS Jacksonville. Turner commanded NMSC from her previous flag command headquarters in Bethesda, Md.

NMSC may have its headquarters based at NAS Jacksonville, but the 27 activities with 4,000+ personnel spearheading multiple missions are located in nine countries, 12 states and the District of Columbia.

"The five components that make

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MEDICINE SUPPORT COMMAND (NMSC) JACKSONVILLE, Fla. – Rear Adm. Richard Vinci (left), Chief of the Navy Dental Corps, prepares to assume command of NMSC from Rear Adm. Carol Turner during the Nov. 16 combined change of command and retirement ceremony held at Naval Air Station Jacksonville. Turner retired after more than 30 years of service. Lt. Cmdr. R. A. Ortiz (center), Naval Hospital Jacksonville Chaplain, was the chaplain for the ceremony. U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communications Specialist 1st Class Nick De La Cruz

Pilot Program Cuts Disability Evaluation Time, Speeds Veterans' Benefits

By Fred W. Baker III, American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON – Defense Department (DoD) and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) officials are piloting a joint program that could effectively dismantle one of the most confusing and frustrating obstacles in wounded warriors' recovery process.

Nine months after Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates said wounded warriors should not return home to battle the bureaucracies of a broken health care system, a year-long test of a new disability evaluation system started this week.

The pilot program began at three major medical hospitals treating wounded service members here in the national capital region. Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Md., and Malcolm Grow Medical Center on Andrews Air Force Base, Md., are taking part in the program.

DoD and VA officials said that partnership is key to the elimination of duplicate processes between the two department's own evaluation systems.

"This is about as good as it can get within the current statutory framework of the DoD's role in disability evaluation and the VA's," said Michael L. Dominguez, principal deputy undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness, at a briefing today at the Pentagon.

"I believe as a long-time Washington insider that it is a significant event that two cabinet agencies have found a way to bridge the boundaries in their organizations such that one cabinet agency ... agrees to be bound by decisions made by officials in another cabinet agency," Dominguez said.

Now that the physical process has been streamlined, a single rating system is in place, and the two departments have agreed to abide by the decisions of each other in order to prevent duplicate efforts.

The new system promises to cut in half a process that has taken up to two years and to offer a seamless transition in care and benefits from active-duty to veteran status, officials said.

In the past, each service had its own disability evaluation and rating system and VA had its own. Wounded service members would go through the service board process of receiving a physical examination, a determination of fit or unfit to continue service, and then, if determined unfit, receive a rating.

That rating determined if the service member was medically retired or separated with severance pay. The service member, once discharged, would enter the VA system, repeat the process, and many times receive a higher disability rating and subsequently a higher level of benefits.

Now, DoD has agreed that VA will conduct a the initial physical examination and, if the service

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Africa Partnership Station Seabees Break Ground on Clinic

By Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class (AW/SW) R.J. Stratchko, Africa Partnership Station Public Affairs

TEMA, Ghana - Africa Partnership Station (APS) and the Ghanaian Navy moved a step closer to substantiality with a partnership ground breaking ceremony launching the construction of a medical clinic in Tema, Nov. 20.

The U.S. Ambassador to Ghana, Pamela Bridgewater, attended the ceremony, as did the Ghanaian Deputy Minister of Defense, The Honorable William Boafo.

"Once the medical clinic is completed, it will be the center of a community outreach performed jointly through the international non-governmental organization Project Hope and doctors from the U.S. Navy," said Bridgewater.

APS is an international effort responding to specific African requests for assistance, collaborated through partnerships and teamwork. The Tema clinic is one of more than a dozen community relations projects planned during this six-month round of APS.

"It is very gratifying that after all the visits our interaction in the partnership has yielded something very good. As we stand here today, we are going to witness the ground breaking for a medical clinic to be built by

the U.S. Seabees in partnership with our work services engineers," said Ghanaian Navy Commodore Matthew Quashie, Eastern Ghana Naval Command.

"The facility that is currently on their base is old and worn, they've asked us to build a new medical facility right outside the Navy base so they can not only treat their military personnel, but so the local people can benefit from the clinic as well," said Lt. j.g. Joseph Clements, project officer with Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 40.

One of the tenets of APS is to grow long-term partnerships with African nations. During the first phase of APS there will be three extended visits to Tema with multiple training opportunities. While most of APS' focus is on training, such projects serve a higher calling in developing partnerships.

"We have been asked to be here, and because of that we are working with West and Central African countries on efforts that are focused on nurturing partnerships with African nations to help them develop maritime safety and security capabilities," said Rear Adm. Tony Kurta, director for Policy, Resources and Strategy, U.S. Naval Forces Europe.

APS 2007 is a U.S. Naval Forces Europe-led initiative, executed by a multi-national staff aboard Fort McHenry and High Speed Vessel 2 Swift.

Navy Environmental Health Center Changes Name

By Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center Public Affairs

PORTSMOUTH, Va. – The command at the center of Navy Medicine's public health efforts has a new name. The Navy Environmental Health Center is now officially the Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center, or NMCPHC.

NMCPHC, known as "the public health center," has always incorporated both Navy and Marine Corps components. The new name more appropriately captures the global nature of the command's public health mission, said Capt. Bill Stover, NMCPHC commanding officer.

"We have provided public health expertise to Navy and Marine Corps activities, public health professionals and communities since our inception, but our name never made

the connection clear," said Stover. "Our new name is intended to make our connection to our customers more intuitive, and thereby strengthen our relationship."

According to Stover, Environmental Health "is a term that is not commonly used, and is not well understood by customers."

"Public Health is used in the United States and around the world to describe activities and professionals who are involved in preventing disease by controlling their sources, promoting health and wellness, and monitoring populations to detect changes in their health status and to recommend interventions preserve health," said Stover. "Our name now reflects what our 250 public health professionals do every day for the Navy and Marine Corps."

The public health center is



headquartered in building three on the Naval Medical Center Portsmouth campus in Portsmouth, Va.

For more information on Navy public health programs, visit the Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center web site at <http://www-nmcphc.med.navy.mil>.

NMSC continued...

(Continued from page 1)

up NMSC – logistics, research, training and education, public health and IT infrastructure – are located across the entire world," said Vinci.

After the traditional Change of Command cere-

mony, NMSC also held a retirement ceremony for Turner. Turner gave warming comments, admitting that for her it was time to move on from the Navy. She then removed her sword and presented it to her husband, symbolizing that her active-duty time was completed.

Fisher House Welcomes "Operation: Deck the Walls"

By Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class John M. Stratton, Fleet Public Affairs Center Atlantic

PORTSMOUTH, Va. - Operation: Deck the Walls made a stop at the Fisher House at Naval Medical Center Portsmouth (NMCP), Nov. 29.

Operation: Deck the Walls is a multi-city program providing monetary donations, holiday gifts and Christmas décor to military families currently residing in Fisher House locations in the U.S.

"Today is truly a blessing, having everyone here to celebrate and give back to the community," said Candice Edwards, operations assistant for the NMCP's Fisher House.

There are 38 Fisher Houses worldwide, all located within walking distance of a major military medical center. These are places that military families can stay for free while visiting their hospitalized loved ones.

Edwards later remarked that helping military families while their service member is in the hospital is what the Fisher House is all about.

Operation: Deck the Walls is a partnership with Walmart and Fisher House to support our nation's military

members and their families during the holiday season.

"I love Christmas and it warms my heart to be doing this," said Marilyn Eaton, a volunteer.

There were more than 20 volunteers from area Walmart and Sam's Clubs who spent the morning decorating the house inside and out. The volunteers also presented Fisher House manager Loretta Loveless and Edwards with a \$5,000 gift card to spend on items to help families' extended stays feel more like home.

"We're all just so grateful and are planning on using this generous gift to purchase LCD TV's for the guest rooms," said Loveless.

Loveless added that any left over money would be used to purchase miscellaneous items such as food and linens.

Past and current donations to the NMCP Fisher House have helped them renovate portions of the house and purchase various items to help make families more comfortable during their stay.



SOUTH KHALI, Bangladesh - Lt. Cmdr. Lou C. Cimorelli, a family practice physician aboard the amphibious assault ship USS Kearsarge (LHD 3) studies an x-ray of a victim of Tropical Cyclone Sidr Nov 28. Kearsarge and the embarked elements of the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) arrived off the coast of Bangladesh to support ongoing relief efforts at the request of the Bangladesh government. *U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl. Peter R. Miller*

Pilot program continued...

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member is determined unfit, will assign the disability rating that will be used to determine type of discharge and subsequent VA benefits. The service member still has an appeal process if they disagree with the rating.

Also, because VA assigns the rating initially, when the service member is discharged they can begin receiving benefits within a few weeks, as opposed to six months or a year later with the previous system.

Changes in the system came after a host of commissions, task forces and review groups have fielded complaints from service members and families. The problems were highlighted at the start of this year when soldier care problems at Walter Reed Army Medical System were publicized in media reports. Calls for revamping the system came from as high as the president.

"It was characterized as unfriendly, redundant and lethargic," Bill Carr, deputy undersecretary of defense for military personnel policy, said of the old system.

Most of the reports and reviews pointed to the need for "a faster, more compassionate, less adversarial and, by all means, more effec-

tive (system). And I think we've done those things," Carr said.

The pilot program will be monitored closely by senior DoD and VA officials during its run and adjusted as needed, Carr said. There is no timeline for implementing the system across the board at other military hospitals.

Initially, eight soldiers at Walter Reed, all who had been through the previous system, tested the new system and reported favorably, said Army Brig. Gen. Mike Tucker, assistant surgeon general for Warrior Care in Transition. Families also reported favorable of the new system.

This pilot comes on the heels of another partnership announced between the two departments last month when they teamed to put in place 10 federal recovery coordinators charged with managing the care of severely injured service members and their families for as long as a lifetime.

Officials said these are the first positions of their kind in the military health care system and were put into place in response to recommendations from service members, families and by the President's Commission on Care for America's Returning Wounded Warriors.

VA officials said their department will hire the coordinators and

are trying to have them on board by January. They will be assigned to Walter Reed Army Medical Center, the National Naval Medical Center, Brooke Army Medical Center on Fort Sam Houston, Texas and Naval Medical Center San Diego.

The program's coordinators are charged with managing all the needs of severely injured service members and their families as the troops move through the recovery and rehabilitation process and return to their communities.

Both agencies have also committed to developing a joint inpatient medical record system. The agencies went as far as swapping their heads of information technology for six months to help break down the barriers of data exchange between the two, officials said.

Also, officials announced today that the two departments have teamed to establish a center of excellence for psychological health and traumatic brain injury. The center started initial operations today in its temporary offices in Rosslyn, Va. The center will serve to advance research on and disseminate information relating to psychological health and traumatic brain injury. The center is led by DoD with VA support and is expected to be fully operational by October 2009.

Wal-Mart Donates to NMCSF Fisher House

By Mass Communication Specialist
3rd Class (SW/AW) Brian Gaines,
Fleet Public Affairs Center, Pacific

SAN DIEGO - Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., donated a \$5,000 gift card to Naval Medical Center San Diego's Zachary and Elizabeth Fisher House Nov. 27 to buy supplies for military families who reside there.

The Zachary and Elizabeth Fisher House started in 1990 to serve as a home away from home for families of retired and active-duty military members while they receive treatment.

"I think it's wonderful, and the families appreciate it too," said Belle Esposito, manager of the San Diego Fisher House. "The San Diego community as a whole has always been extremely loyal to the military, and this is another example of how they support it."

Wal-Mart also donated \$1,300 to all 39 Fisher Houses in the U.S. and Europe for food and holiday decorations.

Additionally, some local Wal-

Mart employees decorated the house with a Christmas tree, poinsettias and garland to give the house a festive holiday appearance.

"It makes me feel good to be able to touch people's lives," said Jennifer Taylor, community coordinator for the Kearney Mesa, Calif. Wal-Mart. "It also makes me feel good to work for a company that gives back to the community."

Comedian and actress Kathy Kinney, best known for her role as Mimi Bobeck on "The Drew Carey Show," was also present to help with the decorations.

"I received an e-mail from a friend at the USO (United Service Organizations)," said Kinney. "I wanted to show my support for the men and women who serve this country, and I also love to decorate."

After the decorations, Casey O'Kane, Wal-Mart representative, presented Esposito with the gift card.

"We at Wal-Mart want to show



SAN DIEGO - Local Wal-Mart store manager Casey O'Kane (right) and fellow employees present Belle Esposito (left), manager of Naval Medical Center San Diego's (NMCSF) Fisher House, with a \$5,000 donation from Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., Nov. 27. The Fisher House provides "a home away from home" for families of wounded service members being treated at NMCSF. U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class

our service men and women our support and to spread some festive holiday cheer," said O'Kane.

Chaplain Corps Recognizes its 232nd Birthday

From Chaplain Corps Public Affairs

WASHINGTON - Members of the Navy Chaplain Corps staff assembled Nov. 28 in recognition of the 232nd anniversary of the Chaplain Corps.

The gathering took place at the Navy Annex, Arlington, Va., where Navy Chief of Chaplains, Rear Adm. Robert F. Burt joined his staff and

thanked them for their sacrifices and support.

Earlier, in a previously recorded anniversary message to the Chaplain Corps, Burt thanked chaplains and religious program specialists (RPs) around the fleet for their service.

"I am proud of your caring and effective ministry that is recognized across our Sea Services and honors God in such observable ways," said Burt.

He added, "This past year has been another one of great opportunity for our Corps to be responsive to the diverse ministry requirements of our Sailors, Marines, Coast Guardsmen, Merchant Marines and all their family members."

In his closing remarks, Burt stated, "Whether chaplain or RP, we are the same. I also want to express my deepest gratitude to your families. Their sacrifices to support

you and your ministry are no less significant than what we experience. They are a gift from God to us and their reinforcement is crucial.

"As we close this chapter on another amazing year of service to God and country, we must certainly do so with hearts of humility. We continue to find divine favor and be blessed in ways that would bear witness to the hand of God at work in our midst. Thank you for taking every assignment seriously and doing whatever you do with all your heart as unto the Lord."



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